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ABSTRACT

This report utilized data from one portion of a study which compared behavior of boys and girls observed in a natural environment and behavior listed by adult raters. Participants were 72 children and six teachers (all women) from two kindergartens in Hamilton, New Zealand, and a group of mothers and fathers from a third school. Two children were observed at the same time; groups included opposite sex and same sex pairs. A 41-item social behavior scale used by the investigator to tally specific behaviors was also used by three teachers in the school to anonymously rate each child's behavior. A questionnaire employing the same 41 behaviors and asking for judgements regarding the behaviors of "most kindergarten girls/boys" was completed by the three teachers and 34 parents from a third school. According to the adults most kindergarten boys and girls differed reliably on 18 out of the 41 social behaviors presented; boys more often disobeyed adults, showed off with adults, argued with peers, hit and fought, shouted, played roughly, quarreled, showed off with peers, and teased. Of these nine differences, only four were the same as those which emerged from direct observation: playing roughly, teasing, showing off with peers, and being noisy. (MV)

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Sex Role Ideology and the Observed Social Behavior of Children

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There is a widely held belief in western culture that a large number of behaviors are reliably related to gender. This belief is perpetuated by our institutions and reinforced by voices within social science. That specific expectations regarding the behavior and characteristics of boys and girls are remarkably consistent as well as pervasive has been amply documented and can be illustrated by data from diverse and significant areas of life.

Despite the uniformity of our expectations regarding gender differences in behavior, careful research often fails to validate them; our prophecies do in fact fail sufficiently often to encourage a careful scrutiny of our sex role ideology not only for its content and consequences for individual personality but for its empirically demonstrated predictive accuracy. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) have examined a vast body of literature and found that most of the widely held beliefs about sex differences are either myths, i.e., not supported by unambiguous evidence, or still untested. And in a recent study of mine the sex role ideology of adults was found to be a relatively unreliable guide to the gender of five-year-old children when gender judgements were made from cues provided by the children's drawings (Lott, 1976).

What I am reporting here tonight are data from one portion of a larger study conducted last spring in New Zealand, in which what boys and girls were observed doing in a natural environment was compared with what adults said they did.

Among the objectives of this study are three which have methodological implications: (1) utilization of a wide range of behaviors in matching what boys and girls do against what they are expected to do; (2) observation in a natural environment of both behavior and the situations in which the behavior occurs; and (3) comparison among three different methods of assessing social behavior: direct observation of individual children, ratings of individual children in their absence, and ratings of boys and girls in general.

The participants in this research were 72 children and 6 teachers (all women) from two kindergartens in Hamilton, New Zealand, and a group of 34 parents of both sexes from a third. All the children attended morning kindergarten three hours each day, five days a week. Each morning, for 19 days in the first school (X) and 18 days in the second (Y), the investigator chose two children at random, but so that approximately one-third of the time the children were of opposite gender, and one-third of the time either both girls or both boys. Observations were made in 15-minute time segments according to a pre-arranged schedule so that each child was observed for 4 segments or a total of one hour during free play periods which constituted the majority of each morning's activities. Altogether 17 boys and 20 girls were observed in the first school and 18 boys and 17 girls in the second.

During observation the investigator followed the target child everywhere, at a discrete distance but within ear range of conversation. The teachers agreed with what the children's behavior indicated, that the observer was largely ignored as part of the general scene, and teachers, children and visitors did not know for certain who was being observed on any given morning.

The observation schedule was devised to sample the social behaviors of four-year-old children in interaction with peers and adults and included categories typically utilized by other investigators. Fourteen adult-related and 27 peer-related behaviors were included. As a specific behavior was observed, it was marked by a single tally; to be tallied again that same behavior would first have to be interrupted either by another person or by new behavior on the part of the child being observed. A single behavior was noted in only one category, e.g., either as "shows off/brags" or as "chats calmly", not as both.

Each of the discrete situations in which behavior occurred was also carefully noted and recorded. Situation was broadly interpreted to mean the kindergarten area within which, or the equipment around which, the child's behavior was observed, e.g., sand pit, story group, play dough, etc.

When the investigator had almost completed the direct observation of children in each of the kindergartens, the three teachers in each school were asked to anonymously rate each child on the same 41 social behaviors. Teachers were instructed to check the one box out of seven which most appropriately described the named child in relation to each of the behaviors, from almost always to almost never.

Each individual child was rated independently by each teacher who completed her forms when not in the presence of the children, but from memory of their behavior.

Each teacher also responded to the same list of 41 social behaviors on a separate sheet of paper which called for judgements about the behavior of "most kindergarten girls" and another which called for judgements about the behavior of "most kindergarten boys". In addition to the six teachers from the two schools 34 parents whose children attended another kindergarten in the same city were asked to complete the same "most . . . girls/boys" questionnaires but only one questionnaire was given to each parent.

From the observation data it was possible to compare boys and girls on some general measures as well as on specific social behaviors and on kindergarten areas utilized for play. Table 1 indicates that although in both schools more observable behaviors were noted on the part of boys than girls when one looks at a number of different play situations an opposite trend appears. In both schools girls played, on the average, in more different places than did boys; this difference is statistically significant in school X. In addition, girls were observed to engage in almost twice as much adult-related behavior as boys, a highly reliable difference in both schools. And girls in both schools differed from boys, again very reliably, in ratio of indoor to outdoor play situations.

Of the 21 different play situations (or areas) provided by each kindergarten, the average proportions with which boys and girls used 13, or the majority of them, did not reliably differ in either school; these include the doll corner, book tables, water trough,

woodworking bench, play dough tables, box or tire area, story corner, lockers, and blocks. Of the remaining eight play areas, half attracted reliably more boys than girls. These are: a miscellaneous category, i.e. play across areas; a raised outdoor platform used for dramatic play like "Batman"; trolleys or wagons; and the sandpit. Results from the two schools are remarkably similar. Girls, on the other hand, in both kindergartens were found reliably more often on the swings, or painting/pasting/drawing; in school X girls also made more use than the boys of the outdoor gym equipment and twice as often as the boys were simply observers of others; in school Y girls were engaged in jigsaw puzzle solving reliably more often than boys.

With regard to social behavior, the frequencies with which each child was observed to engage in each of the 41 kinds listed on the observation schedule were converted to proportions of total behavior observed. Gender differences were analyzed for each behavior by two-tailed Mann-Whitney U tests. Eleven behaviors were so rarely (or never) observed in both schools on the part of either boys or girls that comparisons were not possible. (Reference to these will be made later.) Of the remaining 30 behaviors only six were clearly and significantly related to gender in both schools, and eight others were reliably related to gender in one school and in each case but one the difference in the other school was in the same direction.

In both schools boys more often than girls were observed: chatting calmly with peers; cooperating with peers; following the

lead of another child; and being noisy. In one school boys more often played roughly, showed off with peers, tagged along, teased, and touched another child. All these behaviors share the common dimension of sociability and indicate a high level of peer interaction. Fewer behaviors were observed significantly more often on the part of girls than boys. In both schools these were chatting with adults, and smiling at adults, and in one school, playing alone, tagging after adults, and being quiet or reserved. Starkly different from the behaviors on which boys' proportions exceed girls', those which girls exhibit more than boys share the dimensions of adult-centeredness and loneness.

It is of equal importance to note those behaviors in which boys and girls were observed to engage with relatively equal frequency, namely arguing with adults or peers, asking for help from adults or peers, following adult instructions, showing off with adults, competing, getting one's own way, grabbing objects, giving help to peers, offering to help peers, hitting or fighting, attempting to lead another child, being quarrelsome, sharing, and smiling at peers.

How do these observed gender similarities and differences compare with teacher ratings? For each child the three ratings made of his or her behavior by the teachers were summed to yield one score and the means of these scores for boys and girls were compared by two-tailed Mann-Whitney tests. Both sets of teachers agreed that the boys in their kindergartens engaged in reliably more fighting, were more noisy, and played more roughly than the girls.

In addition, boys were seen as differing significantly from girls by school X teachers in that they more often: cried in the presence of adults; disobeyed adults; grabbed objects; were quarrelsome; and teased. School Y teachers saw the boys in their kindergarten as asking for more help from peers than did the girls.

With respect to those behaviors on which the teachers rated their girls more highly than their boys, there was agreement on the part of teachers in both schools that the girls more often offered to help adults. Girls in one school were also rated significantly higher than boys on following instructions, smiling at adults, giving help to peers, and smiling at peers; and in the other school on following after adults, showing affection to peers, and giving sympathy to peers.

From teachers' ratings of individual children, when the latter were not present and not under direct observation, one can find a consistent pattern in those behaviors which reliably distinguish between the sexes: four-year-old boys, according to their teachers, are more rowdy, immature, and less docile than girls; and four-year-old girls, according to their teachers, are more helpful, pleasant, and sympathetic. But in only four instances, as can be seen in Table 2, did teacher ratings of individual children prove congruent with the results of direct observation/ which indicated that girls more than boys smile at adults, tag after adults, while boys more than girls are noisy and play roughly.

The ratings of "most kindergarten boys" and "most kindergarten girls" by the same teachers and a sample of parents provide our

empirically obtained picture of the sex role ideology. Table 2 permits comparison of this ideology with the results of direct observation previously described and teacher ratings of the individual children which may be said to represent an intermediate position somewhere between these two poles.

It can be seen that not only did direct observation and sex role ideology assessment yield differing numbers of gender differences but, more importantly, the qualitative nature of these differences appear not to be the same. An examination of Table 2 indicates that according to the adults most kindergarten boys and girls differ reliably on 18 out of the 41 social behaviors presented and that boys, more than girls, disobey adults, show off with adults, argue with peers, hit and fight, shout, play roughly, quarrel, show off with peers, and tease. Of these nine differences, only four are the same as those which emerged from direct observation: playing roughly and teasing (school X), showing off with peers (school Y), and being noisy (both schools). What is missing from the observations but present in the ideology is the picture of four-year-old boys as disobedient and quarrelsome.

The behaviors which four-year-old girls are more likely to exhibit than four-year-old boys, according to the ideology, are: clinging to adults, asking for adult help, showing affection to peers, being cooperative, showing fright, helping peers, being quiet/reserved, smiling at peers, giving sympathy, and following instructions. Only one of these ten differences (in quietness) was apparent in the behavior of girls and boys when directly observed. None of the

expected differences in dependence, helpfulness, and pleasantness was observed.

It is of considerable interest that some of the behaviors which the ideology leads us to expect will reliably differentiate boys from girls was rarely or never observed on the part of children of either gender; these were clinging, disobeying, showing affection to peers, showing fright, helping peers (school X), hitting (school X), and giving sympathy. Another social behavior, cooperation, was actually observed more on the part of boys than girls, which is opposite to expectation from the ideology, and in one school girls tended more than boys to brag to adults, again counter to the sex role ideology.

In summary, the four-year-old boys and girls in our sample were observed to relate to one another and to adults for the most part in a very similar fashion. With relatively equal frequency, girls and boys argued, asked for help, followed adult instructions, competed, got their own way, grabbed objects, helped one another, hit one another, quarreled, shared, and smiled. The prevalent sex role ideology would not lead us to expect so many similarities nor that they would be in the areas cited.

Present in the ideology, but missing in the observations, is the picture of four-year-old boys as disobedient and quarrelsome, and of four-year-old girls as dependent, helpful, and pleasant. And conversely, absent from the ideology, but apparent in the observations, is the picture of the girl at play alone or as onlooker and the boy more often than the girl touching, chatting, and cooperating with peers.

In this investigation hypotheses were also tested relevant to

differences between children whose social behavior matches adult expectations well and those whose behavior matches expectations less well. But discussion of these data must wait for another time.

References

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TABLE 1

Boys and Girls Compared on Free Play Social Behaviors Observed During Four 15-Minute Periods

	Boys		Girls		p^a
Mean no. of total behaviors observed					
School X[b]	169.6		127.6		$<.10$
School Y[c]	229.2		190.9		ns
Mean Proportion of Adult-Related Behaviors					
School X[b]	.105		.186		$<.002$
School Y[c]	.136		.265		$<.02$
Mean no. of different play situations					
School X[b]	7.9		10.1		$<.05$
School Y[c]	8.9		9.8		ns
Frequencies (and proportions) of indoor and outdoor play situations	In	Out	In	Out	
School X[b]	67	145	148	141	
	(.32)	(.68)	(.51)	(.49)	$<.001$[d]
School Y[c]	147	134	176	75	
	(.52)	(.48)	(.70)	(.30)	$<.001$[d]

[a] Two-tailed probabilities; Mann-Whitney U tests

[b] $N_{boys} = 17$; $N_{girls} = 17$

[c] $N_{boys} = 18$; $N_{girls} = 17$

[d] Chi-Square tests

TABLE 2

Differences in The Social Behavior[a] of Boys and Girls

as Related to Three Methods of Assessment

Behavior	Direction of Difference	ASSESSMENT METHOD				
		Direct Observation p values		Teacher Ratings of Inds. p values		Teacher & Parent Ratings of "Most Boys/Girls" p
		School X	School Y	School X	School Y	
Chats calmly - Adults	G > B	<.02	<.05	ns	ns	ns
Clings - Adults	G > B	ns[b]	ns[b]	ns	ns	<.025
Cries - Adults	B > G	ns[b]	ns[b]	<.05	ns	ns
Disobeys - Adults	B > G	ns[b]	ns[b]	<.002	ns	<.01
Asks Help - Adults	G > B	ns	ns	ns	ns	<.05
Offers Help - Adults	G > B	ns[b]	ns[b]	<.05	<.01	ns
Follows instructions	G > B	ns	ns	<.05	ns	<.10
Shows off - Adults	B > G	ns	ns	ns	ns	<.05
Smiles - Adults	G > B	<.002	<.05	<.05	ns	ns
Tags along - Adults	G > B	ns[b]	<.02	ns	<.02	ns
Shows Affection - Peers	G > B	ns[b]	ns[b]	ns	<.02	<.005
Plays alone	G > B	<.02	ns	ns	<.10	ns
Argues - Peers	B > G	ns	ns	ns	ns	<.005
Chats calmly - Peers	B > G	<.05	<.05	ns	ns	ns
Cooperative	G > B	(<.10 B>G)	(<.10 B>G)	ns	ns	<.025
Shows fright - Peers	G > B	ns[b]	ns[b]	ns	ns	<.05
Follows Lead of another	B > G	<.002	<.01	<.10	ns	ns
Grabs Objects	B > G	ns	ns	<.02	ns	ns
Asks for Help	B > G	ns	ns	ns	<.02	ns

TABLE 2 (Cont'd)

Direction of Difference	Direct Observation: $\underline{Z}$ values		Teacher Ratings of Time: $\underline{Z}$ values		Checklist of Problem Behaviors
	School	Special	School	Special	
G > B	ns[b]	ns	<.05	ns	<.05
B > G	ns[b]	< .10	< .002	< .01	< .005
B > G	< .02	< .05	< .02	< .10	< .005
B > G	< .002	ns	< .002	< .05	< .005
B > G	ns	ns	< .02	ns	< .005
G > B	< .02	ns	ns	ns	< .05
B > G	ns	< .05	ns	ns	< .01
G > B	ns	ns	< .05	ns	< .05
G > B	ns[b]	ns[b]	ns	< .05	< .025
B > G	ns	< .05	ns	ns	ns
B > G	< .02	ns	< .02	ns	< .005
B > G	< .02	ns	ns	ns	ns
	10	8	13	7	18

[a]A behavior is included in this table only if a gender difference at the .05 level of probability (2-tailed) was found at least once or at the .10 level of probability at least twice.

[b]Behavior was observed to occur so rarely that an analysis of gender differences was precluded.